



DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

INFORMATION SERVICE

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

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On the basis of its annual inventory of the migratory waterfowl in the United States, the Fish and Wildlife Service of the Department of the Interior today estimated the population at 105,500,000. The 1945 estimate represents a decrease of approximately 20,000,000 from the 1944 figure, Dr. Ira N. Gabrielson, director of the Service reported to Secretary of the Interior Harold L. Ickes.

Dr. Gabrielson said that the current estimate of the decline in the population of ducks, geese, and other migratory waterfowl, may not be exact. He pointed out that the 1944 population may have been over-estimated, that the 1944-45 shooting season was the "most freakish in the memory of the oldest hunters", and that millions of ducks which normally winter in the United States may have gone on south to Mexico, Cuba, Hispaniola, or even Central American countries.

"The fact remains", Dr. Gabrielson said, "that on the basis of tabulations made throughout the country by Fish and Wildlife Service biologists, game management agents, and refuge managers, aided by state game wardens, and personnel from many other federal and state agencies, the total breeding population of ducks and geese is estimated at about 105,500,000."

During the 1944-45 shooting season, he declared, in many parts of the country the birds, delayed in Canada by mild weather and plenty of food, were nearly a month late. Some famous duck areas, particularly on the Atlantic Coast, never did get a good flight. In others, as in parts of the Great Plains area, the supply of birds was the best in two or three decades.

"Abundance of food and water throughout most of the parts of the country undoubtedly resulted in an unusually wide dispersal", Dr. Gabrielson said, "and this may have resulted in a substantial number of birds being overlooked in the inventory. In general, however, the Fish and Wildlife Service tabulators and their assistants obtained an approximately normal coverage. Every important wintering ground was covered by air, chiefly through the cooperation of the Coast Guard, Naval Air Service, and the Army Air Forces."

On the basis of the four great flyway systems, the losses in population show up almost entirely in the Atlantic and Mississippi regions, as increases were recorded for both the Central and Pacific flyways.

"In all flyways there is evidence that we must watch the status of some species such as the Redhead, Lesser Scaup, Ruddy Duck, and Canada Goose, Dr. Gabrielson declared. "A few species, among them the Gadwall, Baldpate, Pintail, Green-winged Teal, and the Snow and White-fronted Geese, registered gains throughout the country.

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"The news that the number of ducks and geese has declined is somewhat disturbing", Dr. Gabrielson said, "but we do not regard it as alarming. Conditions on the breeding grounds last summer were good so that we were expecting an increase in the population. We may have over-estimated then and we may be under-estimating now and, as I have pointed out, large numbers of the ducks may have wintered south of the United States. In any event, if conditions on the breeding grounds are good this summer, we hope that there will be a full recovery in numbers."

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